## Chapter One

## Terrorism Threat and Response: A Policy Perspective

*James M. Smith and William C. Thomas*

### Introduction

Observations of the terrorism of most interest to the United States can be organized into two distinct periods of inquiry. The first begins with the advent of the modern era of international political terrorism that began to directly affect the United States roughly from 1970.[1] This terrorism was characterized by its political motivation and agenda, its conservative approach to weapons, tactics, and casualties, and its clear lines of authority and structure—even including in many cases state sponsorship and sponsor-imposed constraints on the range of available action. This is what we refer to here as "traditional" terrorism.

The second period of terrorism of direct interest to the United States is that of the "new" terrorism that became evident in the last decade of the 20th century. After a decline in terrorism directed at the United States following the concerted anti- and counter-terrorism efforts of the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the U.S. witnessed a rapid succession of devastating terrorist attacks. From the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, through the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, to the 1998 bombings of two United States Embassies in Africa, the US government and academic community witnessed a new wave of interest and action. And standing behind this renewed attention stood the "poster child" of this "new" terrorism—Aum Shinrikyo and its Sarin chemical gas attack in the Tokyo subway system in 1995. The renewal of terrorism directed against U.S. targets, the advent of terror attacks on the U.S. homeland, and the demonstrated prospect of the terrorist employment of weapons of mass destruction all coincided to usher in a new wave of examination of the expanding terrorist threat and of the broadened requirement for U.S.

government response. It is those subjects—the changing threat and expanded response—that are addressed in this book.

## Purpose

The terrorism threat of interest in this volume is specifically that directed at U.S. citizens, property, and interests both at home and abroad. American citizens abroad have long been primary victims of international terrorism. Added to that continuing trend is the advent of both transnational and homegrown terrorism within the continental United States. Those two factors are not likely to change any time soon. As Bruce Hoffman puts it, "Terrorists have targeted the United States more often that any other country. . . . The reasons why the United States is so appealing a target to terrorists suggest no immediate reversal of this attraction."[2]

Thus, it is both necessary and timely to undertake a comprehensive examination of the changing terrorist threat and of appropriate response actions from a U.S. government policy perspective. This book presents some pointed observations and recommendations as inputs to that examination. It asks what has really changed and what stays the same in terms of the terrorist threat. It examines resultant changes and threads of continuity for appropriate response mechanisms and capabilities. It presents recommendations to prevent, deter, preempt, defend against, mitigate, and respond to the new threat. And it examines the status and adequacy of response policy and organization to meet that threat. Perhaps most significantly, it undertakes all of those tasks specifically from a practitioner's perspective, lending added salience to its message.

## Overview

In reviewing his efforts in research and writing on terrorism, Brian Jenkins recently observed "Over a quarter century of research, yet terrorism persists. It is because terrorism is not a problem that awaits a solution. But rather . . . it is a changing threat."[3] While there remains much legitimate debate over the extent, imminence, and nature of the "new" dimension of the threat, terrorism has clearly changed since the 1970s and 1980s. While the number of incidents

may be dropping, the lethality of attacks against Americans has risen sharply. Those attacks today include targets in the United States as well as overseas, and the possibility of an attack involving weapons of mass destruction has become very real. Like any other social phenomenon, terrorism evolves over time as the society of which it is a part continues to change. Much of that perceived change, as depicted in the media, is based on anecdotes, worst case scenarios, or simple, unreasoned fear of the unknown. Rational analysis of the modern terrorist threat reveals not only how the nature of terrorism is changing, but also how the U.S. can organize to deter it and, if necessary, mitigate the effects of an incident.

This book is a collection of current research from academia, the U.S. government, and the private sector. The authors' experiences and approaches to the issue vary, but they share a deep understanding of the concepts underpinning terrorism. They provide an analytical approach that promotes an awareness of the terrorist's perspective, and then develop a strategic structure for combating it. Their recommendations regarding operational and organizational measures provide policymakers with several options for addressing modern threats.

Those threats are different in some fundamental ways today than they were twenty years ago. The first section analyzes the changes that have taken place and forecasts the most likely concerns in the near future. There is consensus among the authors that the strategic environment has changed, resulting in groups that are more difficult to detect and motivations that increase the possibility of mass casualties. The use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), including nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, appears somewhat more possible, in light of not only changing objectives but also the availability of weapon components. A relatively new terrorist tool, cyberterrorism, increases the risk of mass disruption of essential services. Though many of the concerns voiced in the mass media appear to be based solely on conjecture and anecdotal evidence, the authors agree that after careful analysis, the threats posed by these new weapons are still very serious.

Meeting these threats may require not only new tactics, but also an entirely new conceptual framework. For decades the American paradigm has been to address terrorism as a criminal problem, but a number of authors suggest that the time has come to treat it as a political issue. Preempting threats from both international and domestic sources may require means that go beyond the traditional legal system. The distinction between military missions and law enforcement tends to blur in some cases, and the result may be increased cooperation between civilian and military agencies in countering, combating, and responding to the threat.

The goals of consequence management efforts should be twofold, as explained in the final section. Obviously, the need to effectively marshal resources following an incident should lead to policies and technologies that can save the most lives and assist in finding those responsible. A second goal of effective consequence management, though, should be to deter an attack by lowering its potential impact, thus reducing the political return to the terrorist. The message that comes through the final two sections is an economic one: raise the cost to the terrorist through preemption, and reduce the gain through effective mitigation of the effects.

In the Foreword, Bruce Hoffman makes the point that the terrorist today is not the stereotypical terrorist of the past. The changes are dramatic, and if the United States does not adjust its response accordingly, it faces grave dangers in the not-too-distant future. Whether the response takes the form of increased law enforcement activity, the use of economic sanctions or incentives, or increased military involvement in counterterrorism, the fact remains that the U.S. must adapt to the threats posed by twenty-first century terrorism.[4]

**The Twenty-First Century Terrorist Threat**

Much as the Cold War seemed to provide some sense of stability in the military arena, the terrorism of the past decades consisted of known enemies whose motivations were generally understood. But just as the world's political structure has changed, so too has the terrorism that is a part of that structure.

Many of the political objectives that limited a terrorist's use of force have given way to new motivations that seem to capitalize on casualties. Horrific weapons of destruction, often foregone in the past, may be just the tool required by modern terrorists. An understanding of this "new" terrorism is essential before measures can be employed to combat it.

Stephen Sloan begins by identifying key indicators that demonstrate how terrorism is evolving in "The Changing Nature of Terrorism." He proposes four areas of change that deserve consistent study: the context and environment of terrorism; changing motivations; technological transformations; and, adaptations in the organizational doctrine of terrorist groups. All of these issues are addressed further by the other contributors to this book. They do indeed turn out to be key points that require analysis.

One item of concern, however, is that policymakers tend to focus on short-run considerations rather than long-term threats or goals. An emphasis on immediate threats and recent incidents may blind policymakers to slowly evolving trends, such as long-term societal changes that are not evident in a short-term analysis. In addition, rapid technological transformations may leave analysts in a reactive mode, not affording them the opportunity to look toward the future. Effective deterrence and preemption of terrorist attacks will require a shift to a long-run analytical approach.

In "The Terrorist Threat to U.S. National Security," James Smith and William Thomas present a broad survey of contemporary terrorism that highlights evolving threats. The authors first outline a model of the essential components of terrorism, including the strategic, operational, and tactical factors, and the linkages between the three. Using the Aum Shinrikyo cult as a case study, they examine terrorist motivations, organizational structures, and the selection of victims and targets, as well as the degree of lethality.

Through a review of relevant literature and an analysis of trend indicators, Smith and Thomas identify four key objectives of terrorist groups. They go on to discuss evolving organizational structures and the means of attack that help terrorists attain these goals. By studying how terrorists are

motivated, and their preferred means of attack, the authors provide guidance to policymakers who develop the U.S. response.

David Kay suggests in "The NBC Threat" that one of the most difficult tasks facing any analyst is to assess the validity of a threat that is still emerging. In this chapter, he addresses the evolving concerns regarding WMD terrorism. The stakes are high in this arena; failing to act early enough can lead to widespread consequences, while focusing too much on the threat can waste resources that might be better spent on addressing more likely forms of terrorism. Kay observes the attention being given to relatively recent events involving nuclear, biological, or chemical threats, and suggests that analysts should keep a balanced view when examining them. Though examples from the past do have value, a simple extrapolation from a few incidents may lead to incorrect conclusions.

Instead of merely projecting past trends into the future, Kay challenges analysts to identify key indicators of the broad changes that may lead to new forms of terrorist attacks. He identifies terrorist motivations, American vulnerabilities, and the ability to use various types of weapons as critical indicators that may signal a change in the threat. His study of these indicators, rather than merely trend analysis, leads him to conclude that the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical terrorism is in fact one that should be taken seriously. He then proceeds to identify the policy implications of this critical analysis.

Another issue that must be taken seriously is cyberterrorism. In "The Cyberterrorism Threat," Gregory Rattray suggests that, as with WMD, the fear of computer-based terrorism is often based more on anecdotal evidence and lack of understanding than on a rigorous analysis of the threat. But much as in the case of WMD, the author's study of terrorist motivations, capabilities, and limitations, leads him to conclude that the threat is serious and growing. He suggests definitions and outlines the scope of activities that might be included in this field.

Rattray identifies two areas of particular concern. First, terrorist capabilities in this field are growing. Rapid technological advancements have created an environment in which a terrorist can conceivably attack and cause widespread disruption with limited danger of American retaliation. Second, America is vulnerable to a disruption of its information systems. While reliance upon the information infrastructure has grown, the problems of limited redundancy and uncoordinated response efforts have grown as well. He concludes with a series of policy recommendations designed to improve system protection and make cyberterrorism more dangerous for its practitioners, in the hopes of removing it as an attractive option.

**Preemption and Deterrence of Twenty-First Century Terrorism**

We can use the analysis from the preceding discussion to explore methods of preventing terrorist acts. Two strategic means are available. First, preemptive measures are designed to understand our own vulnerabilities, learn of efforts to take advantage of those vulnerabilities, and interdict those efforts. Going hand in hand with this are policies to deter attacks by raising the stakes for the terrorist, whether through threats of retaliation or by reducing our vulnerabilities and making success much harder.

David Tucker begins by examining America's approach to the previously identified threats in "Combating International Terrorism." His thesis is that the current paradigm, that terrorism be addressed as a criminal act rather than a political one, is inappropriate. The perspective of terrorists is that their acts are political in nature. In order to effectively understand and prevent their activities, authorities should consider adopting the same point of view.

Tucker reviews the new form of terrorism that must be addressed. Modern terrorism has a distinctive structure that makes more use of networks than of independent cells. Advances in communications have facilitated the employment of networks to enhance efficiency and security. There has also been an increase in "amateur terrorism" perpetrated not by established organizations, but by ad-hoc groups that come together to plan and carry out a single mission before disbanding. These terrorists are very difficult to identify

and track. Finally, the lethality of terrorist acts has increased as terrorist motivations have changed and more deadly means have been employed. Dr Tucker suggests that the U.S. response must address these new aspects of terrorism. The American interagency structure consists of formal and informal networks; perhaps a more structured hierarchy would be more appropriate. The US should also employ the proper tools to meet the current style of terrorism. Economic sanctions and threats of force may be more useful in response to state-sponsored terrorism, but economic incentives and increased intelligence efforts may prove more suitable for the growing non-state threat.

James Wirtz argues in "Antiterrorism via Counterproliferation" that this particular tool can be effective well beyond the problem of state use of WMD against military forces, and can bolster US counterterrorism efforts. He begins with an explanation of counterproliferation and demonstrate its applicability to different threats. Though designed to deter and protect against the use of WMD by states against military forces, he writes that it can be very effective in countering the use of WMD by terrorist actors.

Wirtz goes on to suggest four propositions. First, although counterproliferation is designed to counter military threats from states, it provides much in the way of deterrence and defense against both state-sponsored and non-state terrorism. This results from the fact that in addition to an element of punishment, an effective counterproliferation strategy emphasizes denial of gains by providing means of mitigating the effects of a WMD attack. His second proposition is that, as the U.S. becomes better at protecting its forces on the battlefield, adversaries are likely to focus more on asymmetric methods, such as terrorism. Third, if the U.S. is therefore more likely to face WMD attacks by non-state groups, then it must be prepared for such an attack. Consequence management preparations then become effective means of countering terrorism. Finally, while there are synergies between counterproliferation and counterterrorism, there are also tradeoffs, especially in terms of budgets and resources.

Another means of countering terrorism is through effective intelligence collection and analysis. Peter Probst reports in "Antiterrorism via Intelligence" that the U.S. intelligence community is searching for new means of combating terrorism. He discusses some of the vulnerabilities that have recently come to light as the U.S. military engages in a wider variety of missions. As American forces become involve in lower-intensity operations, new threats arise in the form of increased employment of third country nationals, and the potential for attacks against bases far removed from the conflict area.

Probst highlights a number of shortfalls that demonstrate the U.S. intelligence community has not responded to the needs of modern terrorism. He suggests that American intelligence analysts need to try to understand terrorists better, to be more aware of their perspective in order to more readily perceive their strategies and tactics. Special attention must be given to the emerging problem of the lone terrorist, such as the Unabomber, who is much more difficult to identify and track than is an organization. Ideally, the offensive and defensive aspects of combating terrorism would be blended together under the auspices of a single organization.

Although not included as a chapter in this book, in a presentation at the conference preceding this volume, "Antiterrorism via Physical Measures," General Wayne Downing and Ambassador Allen Holmes emphasized the point that we must understand the terrorist's perspective. While Tucker frames his expression of this point in the context of deterring terrorists at the strategic level, Downing and Holmes focused instead on the operational and tactical levels. By seeing what the terrorist sees, they argued, we will be in a better position to prevent a particular attack or, if prevention fails, to protect the potential victims and reduce the success of an incident.

Downing and Holmes suggested that, just as terrorists can adopt new weapons and new structures, so too can the United States. They also recommended that viewing a situation from the standpoint of a terrorist, rather than as a victim or a responder, can lead to a better understanding of the

threats and vulnerabilities. For instance, they suggested reviewing the "essential elements of information" about a particular target in order to find and address the same weaknesses that terrorist are searching for. They offered a strategy of deterrence, denial, detection and protection, and recommended methods for achieving each. Finally, they concluded with a series of policy recommendations that included, among others, a reexamination of the balance between the safety of deployed military forces and the accomplishment of the mission.[5] Their analysis and recommendations add a significant dimension to the operational lessons presented for government action in this book.

**Responding to and Organizing for Twenty-First Century Terrorism**

Should an attack occur, its ultimate impact will depend on the response by government agencies. A point that becomes clear through these chapters is that the response structure, though outlined on paper, relies in many cases on informal relationships to overcome the problems of overlapping authority and communication between agencies. Though new capabilities and organizational doctrine are being developed, the need exists for a comprehensive review of the means of mitigating the effects of an attack. Deterrence will also be enhanced as it becomes clear that a terrorist incident is unlikely to have the desired impact.

William Thomas, in "The Military's Response to WMD Terrorism," explores the requirements for DoD support to civil authorities in the aftermath of a domestic WMD event. Those requirements, for training civilian first responders and providing rapid support after an incident, are also tightly constrained in law, which Thomas states is probably overly restrictive for today's environment. He also explores the expectations that civilian responders hold for military support, with both federal and state officials including DoD assets in their contingency plans. He also overviews the current state of ongoing development of military capabilities that might be brought to the response effort, finding a long and growing list of military units and efforts tailoring their missions, equipment, and training to ensure the capability to support domestic WMD response.

Thomas provides an evaluation of the effectiveness of the military response to date in fulfilling the tasking of executive and congressional directives and existing response plans. In general, he finds that a good start has been made, but that much remains to be done to provide the level of integrated response that a major WMD attack would demand. Finally, he reminds us throughout that the objective of the military response to domestic WMD terrorism is deterrence—mitigation of the consequences of the attack so as to render WMD attack a less attractive option for terrorists seeking to reach their action goals. That must remain a visible goal across all efforts.

In a related presentation on "Consequence Management" at the INSS terrorism conference preceding this book effort, Rick Roman of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, addressed the initial detection of and response to a domestic chemical or biological (CBW) attack.[6] He defined consequence management in this case as being a three-part plan designed to protect public health, restore essential services, and provide emergency services. The public health system will play a major role in determining the scope of a response to a CBW incident. There is already a set of agents for which the public health system monitors in order to identify an attack and sound the alarm. In the event of a CBW attack, the public health system has four primary goals. First is the detection of an attack, followed closely by a diagnosis of its nature. It then becomes necessary to evaluate the scope of the exposure and identify and implement the appropriate control measures.

According to Roman, one of the major difficulties in addressing CBW terrorism is differentiating between a naturally occurring illness and a terrorism attack. Indeed, one of the most vexing problems in combating CBW terrorism is recognizing that an attack has occurred. The CDC has established a set of indicators that they use as part of a nationwide health surveillance system. Working closely with a network of state and local public health agencies, they hope to identify an attack early enough to be able to initiate a response before the exposure becomes widespread. Rapid identification, he pointed out, is essential if an effective response is to be mustered.

In another conference presentation not specifically included in this book but covering earlier efforts in the evolution of military response capabilities, "Military Support for Civil Response to Attacks Using Weapons of Mass Destruction," Colonel Jay Steinmetz agreed with a number of our authors when he suggested that the U.S. may need to reconsider the view that terrorism is a crime rather than a political act.[7] As has been proposed earlier, events in the 1990s demonstrated that the modern forms of terrorism may result in the criminal paradigm leading to a less effective response. He went on to review the integrated civil-military structure that has evolved over time, and finds many problems of overlapping authority and unclear chains of command. These problems will need to be addressed, he pointed out, if the system for combating terrorism is to be an effective deterrent to terrorists. He suggested that the DoD is unique in its ability to mobilize manpower and resources quickly, but its role has yet to be fully developed.

There are a number of piecemeal solutions that will contribute to the effort, though they will not by themselves lead to a fully integrated structure. Key among these, he pointed out, is the creation of the Rapid Assessment and Initial Detection (RAID) teams. Steinmetz analyzed the role and capabilities of these units, which are already being deployed. The RAID concept integrates the National Guard into the counterterrorism structure, bringing with it national coverage, a rapid initial response capability, dedicated communications bandwidth, and significant resources for reachback purposes. He cautioned, though, that this is merely a first step toward synergizing the hundreds of disparate efforts spread throughout the Federal, state, and local levels of government.

"International Incident Response," written by the staff of the Operations Directorate of the State Department's Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, takes us beyond the domestic realm and addresses the problems arising when terrorists strike Americans overseas. Though the U.S. developed emergency support teams for domestic and international incidents over a decade ago, the response to a foreign incident is still muddled by

controversy. Incidents such as the bombings of two U.S. embassies in Africa demonstrate the need to resolve these issues, lest they hinder the efforts to protect Americans overseas.

One of the major problems that has dogged the American response is the uneven application of the "no concessions" policy, under which the U.S. states it will not negotiate with terrorists, but which was not always followed during the 1980s. Another concern stems from the question of when it is appropriate to send American resources abroad in response to a terrorist attack. Depending on the incident and the environment, it may be preferable to defer to the host nation's response structure while the U.S. merely provides support. In other, non-permissive environments, a more direct response by the U.S. may be required. Of course, the U.S. has to decide whether to send unique counterterrorism resources overseas at all, as that may leave us more vulnerable to a domestic attack. Finally, in order to provide an overseas response capability, appropriate resources need to be procured. There are currently many questions regarding the nature of the equipment that is required and the source of the funding. Until these issues are resolved, response teams must operate with equipment that is rapidly becoming outdated. In addition to replacing aging equipment, of course, the U.S. must prepare for new forms of attacks as well.

Finally, Douglas Menarchik deviates from some of the other authors as he suggests in "Organizing to Combat Twenty-First Century Terrorism" that leadership is more important than organizational structure in determining the effectiveness of the country's response to terrorism. He identifies five issues that have consistently been debated over the past thirty years: the threat and nature of terrorism; terrorist priorities; the criminal nature of terrorist acts; efficacy of a legal, rather than a military, response; and the question of whether terrorism is a symptom of underlying causes or separate from those causes. As the answers to these questions change from administration to administration, they shape the American response to terrorism.

Menarchik reviews the terrorism policies and perspectives of senior leaders throughout the last five administrations. He identifies both the changes in policies and the recurring themes. By noting the trends, he forecasts future threats and suggests possible responses. Above all, he recommends a low-key approach that maintains terrorism as a priority for each administration. Rather than creating a new bureaucracy, such as a "terrorism czar," he suggests instead doing a better of job of integrating current efforts.

**The Road Ahead**

Changing threats to American national security demand new methods of addressing them. Whether these include new organizations or merely a restructuring of existing capabilities, it is imperative that the U.S. recognize the changing nature of the terrorist threat. An effective response is one that can deter and preempt an attack, either through raising the threat to the terrorist or reducing the potential impact. Jay Davis writes in the Epilogue that the U.S. has realized there is no "silver bullet" approach to combating terrorism. Instead, it is pursuing a number of options which, when combined effectively, can significantly reduce the threat to Americans at home and abroad. The key to countering terrorism effectively, he writes, is to learn from past successes and failures, recognize the need for change, and ensure the executive and legislative branches share a common vision for the future.

This collection of experience, wisdom, and recommendations, then, addresses the enduring and changing threat, policies and approaches to prevent the realization of that threat, and both operational methods to mitigate the effects of a realized threat and organizational schemes to better coordinate and direct U.S. government actions to counter terrorism. A word of caveat before we present the collected wisdom. The chapters that follow are uneven in content and scope, inconsistent in approach, and incomplete in addressing the full range of the topic at hand. There are several reasons for this outcome. First, we limited the authors to either current or recent past employees of the U.S. government, or to those whose contractor or consultant activities keep

them closely linked to that government, in order to ensure a policy focus and practical applicability to the book. Second, we asked them to keep their contributions unclassified and releasable. Finally, we asked first for conference presentations on their activities of focus, but then for follow-on chapters for consideration for this book. As a result, the chapters are very uneven in length. Some are much more broadly cast than others to add to the educational value of the collection, while others are more tightly constrained due to their subject matter and the sensitivity of much of the material in that particular area. The work is incomplete largely because some of the conference papers could not be crafted as chapters, or their presenters were too involved in policy implementation to reflect in writing on past policy inputs and activities. Some of the presenters have been "riding a moving train" as their particular areas of policy have been in dynamic development and continue to be unsettled. Thus, we present what we believe is a valuable contribution to the study of the terrorism threat and U.S. Government response, but we make no claim as to providing the complete and final word in this arena.

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[1] Brian Jenkins cites 1972 as the pivotal year. The combination that year of the Lod Airport attack by members of the Japanese Red Army and the Munich Olympic seizure of Israeli athletes by Black September prompted President Nixon to create the Cabinet Committee to Combat Terrorism. The issue was clearly established on the U.S. government action agenda that year. See Brian Michael Jenkins, "Foreword," in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), iii.

[2] Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism Trends and Prospects," in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (RAND, 1999), 35.

[3] Jenkins, "Foreword," xiii.

[4] For a later update on Hoffman's evolving characterization of the "new terrorism" see his remarks in "America and the New Terrorism: An Exchange," *Survival* 42 (Summer 2000): 156-172.

[5] See USAF Institute for National Security Studies Conference Report, *Twenty-First Century Terrorism and U.S. National Security*, 27-28 July 1998.

[6] Ibid. The conference report includes both a more pointed review of Mr. Roman's remarks and copies of his presentation slides.

[7] Ibid. The conference report includes both a more pointed review of Col Steinmetz's remarks and copies of his presentation slides.